

1. Brief Description of Political Engagement Project

In order to strengthen undergraduate education for responsible, engaged citizenship, the Political Engagement Project describes and assesses the impact of 21 undergraduate courses and extra-curricular programs designed to foster informed political engagement. Political engagement is broadly defined to include community engagement with a systemic dimension and other aspects of public policy, as well as electoral politics at local, state, and national levels. These courses and programs are located at a diverse set of institutions across the country and draw a wide range of students, including many racial/ethnic minorities and first generation college students.

The project documents the goals and pedagogies of the participating courses and programs, students' perspectives on their experiences in the program, and the impact of these experiences on key dimensions of political development such as knowledge and understanding, active involvement, sense of political efficacy and identity, and skills of democratic participation. Students completed a survey before and after each course or program, and a small number of students from each were interviewed in depth. The faculty leaders were also interviewed and completed a survey.

Analyses of these data show that the courses and programs do succeed in increasing students' political understanding, participation, skills, and action. This is so both for students who enter the courses and programs with little interest in politics and those who enter already very interested and engaged.

Given widespread charges of liberal bias on college campuses, it is interesting to note that students are entering these courses and programs with a broad spectrum of political beliefs, and their party identification and political ideologies (self-ratings of liberal-conservative) do not show significant change from pre to post.

A book based on the Political Engagement Project, *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Political Engagement*, was published by Jossey-Bass in 2007. The book is structured around key goals and pedagogies of education for political engagement, including structured reflection, research and action projects, outside speakers, and external placements. The book spells out the specific purposes these pedagogies serve and offers guidelines for using them, warnings about challenges they present, and suggestions for overcoming those challenges. The book also addresses the importance of open inquiry and diversity of opinion in education for democratic participation, along with strategies for ensuring open-minded consideration of alternative perspectives.

The latter stage of the project involves working with faculty and administrators around the country to disseminate lessons learned. A key part of this effort is an initiative of the American Democracy Project, which is sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), in partnership with *The New York Times*. This initiative involves working with eight AASCU campuses: Ferris State University, Illinois State University, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), Kennesaw State University, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York,

Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Sam Houston State University, and Western Kentucky University. The leaders of these campuses are committed to ensuring that their students gain the understanding, skills, and motivation needed to be politically engaged. These campuses are working with the Carnegie Foundation to realize that commitment, using the book as a core text for this work. In addition, the project leaders are disseminating the results of the project in various publications and at national and regional meetings.

The Political Engagement Project is directed by Elizabeth Beaumont, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, and Anne Colby and Thomas Ehrlich, both of whom are Senior Scholars at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Judith Torney-Purta, Professor of Human Development at the University of Maryland at College Park, and Josh Corngold, a graduate student in Education at Stanford University, are collaborators on the project.